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UNCLAS CAIRO 008288

SIPDIS

NEA/PD FOR FRANK FINVER

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: STRIFE IN ALEXANDRIA BLAME GAME; PARLIAMENT

CHANNEL PREMIERS: EGYPTIAN MEDIA, OCTOBER 24 TO 30

1. Summary: Commentary on sectarian violence in Alexandria on October 21 continued, with many commentators condemning the violence and a few blaming religious leaders for failing to control their followers. The editor-in-chief of Egypt's leading newspaper, Al-Ahram, was critical of the Muslim Brotherhood's alleged role in the violence. The Egyptian media continued to have a negative view of the U.N. Mehlis report, with many commentators alleging that Syria was being "targeted," just like Iraq was, by the U.S. An unsigned editorial in large circulation Al-Akhbar asked on October 26, "Can anyone do something to stop America's plans against Syria?" The Ministry of Information and Egyptian TV (ETV) launched a new channel the Parliament Channel on October 27 to educate and prepare the public for November's parliamentary elections. End summary.

2. Alexandria: All pro-government newspapers emphasized in October 24 news coverage that "calm" had been restored to Alexandria, and over 100 arrests made, after rioters attacked churches on October 21 after Friday prayers. A columnist writing October 24 in independent daily Nahdet Masr (circulation: 20,000) criticized the lack of "rule of law" and religious leaders for their "failures" in controlling their followers. Another commentator wrote in pro-government Al-Akhbar (circulation: 800,000), "With parliamentary elections coming up, is it sheer coincidence that this tragedy occurred now and during Ramadan, as well?" A conservative commentator in ardently pro-government Al-Gomhouriya (circulation: 500,000) wrote on October 24, "The Copts should be blamed for taking the church as their country and feeling discriminated all the time," and warned "if [Islamic] fundamentalists were given the chance to take over, the Copts would then know the true meaning of the word 'discrimination.'" A columnist writing in opposition Al-Wafd (circulation: 50,000) on October 25 opined that "Egypt is as targeted as Iraq and Syria. Thus, the sectarian strife in Alexandria is part of a plot against Egypt." Osama Saraya, editor-in-chief of leading pro-government daily Al-Ahram (circulation: 750,000), criticized the Muslim Brotherhood's use of "religious slogans for political reasons," which he claimed "was the cause of the strife in Alexandria."

3. Syria vs. the world: Critical commentary in the Egyptian media on the U.N. Mehlis report continued this week, kicked off by the comments of a magazine editor on Nile News on October 24, "The Mehlis committee conducted its investigation with the Lebanese, Syrians, and Palestinians, but not with Israel the only party that will benefit from Hariri's assassination!" Nabil Zaki, the Editor of opposition, Nasserite newspaper Al-Ahali (circulation: 20,000) and a consistent critic of the U.S. wrote the same day that the U.S. is "besieging Syria, instead of siding with it as the victim of Israeli occupation." The themes of "double standards" Syria criticized by the international community while Israel goes "unpunished," in the words of one commentator in Al-Ahram and the "Iraq model" Syria being "targeted" by the U.S., in the words of several commentators were prominent last week. "Any sanctions against the Syrian people will be unfair and unleash an enormous wave of hatred for the U.S.," warned an unsigned editorial in Al-Ahram on October 25. "Syria is going through the same process that Iraq went through," commented a columnist in Al-Ahram the following day. On October 26, the unsigned editorial in Al-Akhbar warned, "The region is heading toward another Arab disaster because of Syria's position on the Mehlis report. The question is, 'Can anyone do something to stop America's plans against Syria?'"

4. Election coverage: ETV's Parliament Channel premiered on October 27. (Note: The channel is broadcast on ETV's Channel 10 and is an initiative by Minister of Information Anas El Fekki to educate the public for November's parliamentary elections. End note.) Over the weekend, the channel broadcast historical documentaries about elections during the Pharaonic, Roman, and Greek eras, as well as modern-day elections. The channel also aired statements by leading Egyptian intellectuals and journalists on the importance of "participating in elections"; interviews with people in the street on what they expect from their elected

representatives; press round-ups; and around-the-clock news bulletins from the government, opposition groups, and NGOs.

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